

Somewhere Down the Road

by Toto

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> <meta name="Generator">  **Somewhere Down the Road**  
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****NOTE:**** This story ends the arc that began in "A Time to be Silent and a Time to Speak," "To Accept the Things We Cannot Change," and "For Emily." I always wondered what happened to Phillip and Jamie, and Joe. The "first" three stories came later to me, as a way of filling in what I always saw as the underlying story - how Amanda's sons (Phillip in particular) dealt with everything as they grew up from teenagers to adults. This one, with all its oddities, is the one I always came back to. Many thanks to my beta readers.

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****Prelude: Arlington, Present Day****

"I can't believe how quiet it is around here," Amanda Stetson said to her husband. Lee looked up as she put a stack of files on the coffee table. "Maybe with no distractions I can get you to finish up some of this!"

"Amanda! You know I hate paperwork."

"It's just routine: old cases, already declassified and awaiting your signature before they go into storage," she patiently explained.

Lee picked up a folder. "Pretty thin," he commented.

Amanda laughed. "Of course they're thin. The details have all been scanned and archived. These are just the summary sheets."

"I guess I should know that," he admitted, "but then again, that's what you're here for." He took the first several folders off of the table and began to go through them. The first few were mostly straightforward: Old KGB surveillance cases, Munich and that first hand off that worked, Alexi, Ivan and Dimitri . . . he flipped ahead in the stack of files . . . Conrad Barnhill and their first trip to London, Emily in Austria.

Lee sighed. He had been missing Emily Farnsworth a whole lot lately; mostly likely due to the press that the Lockerbie trial was getting. He thought of his daughter, her namesake, and wished that the two of them would have had a chance to know each other. One little bomb, and such a large void. Finally, after many years the trial had begun. Maybe now there would be some justice. Lee picked up another folder . . . Stemwinder. Were they really declassifying that one? Flipping ahead he noticed that there was no folder on Addi Birol. That one must still be buried somewhere, he thought. After a few minutes, he looked up. Amanda sat in the chair across from him, watching.

"Been a heck of a career, huh Scarecrow?" she asked. He nodded his head in acknowledgment. "What do you have planned for the next twenty-five years of it?"

"I don't know, I guess just see where it takes us. I definitely have plans for the next twenty-five hours or so, and they do not include files."

"Twenty-five hours?" Amanda asked. "What about Em?"

"Jamie said he'd bring her back after dinner tomorrow night. They're enjoying having her over to help with the babies. I think Beth is even taking her shopping tomorrow afternoon as partial payment." He put down the folders, and began to approach her. At that moment, the phone rang.

"Why don't I get that in the other room?" Amanda said as she ran into the kitchen. "Keep signing those files!"

"Amanda! If this is another call about the party, can't we just forget it?"

"No! Francine is even coming in from London. You're getting a fiftieth bash whether you like it or not. Now let me get that call!"

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****Chapter One: August 1991, University of Virginia,
Charlottesville****

Phillip watched as Lee and Jamie took the last bags from the car, and brought them into the dorm. Amanda sat on the grass with him and watched as the car was closed and the last of her son's belongings were no longer in her line of sight. She sighed, and looked over at Phillip. "Well, it looks like that's about everything."

"Yeah, guess so," Phillip answered. "I wish they had let me help."

Amanda shook her head. "I think they wanted to give us a little time alone. Lee was afraid I'd start crying or something." She smiled. "Don't worry. I won't. It's just so hard to believe that you're old enough to be here, starting college. That I'm old enough for you to be here!"

Phillip laughed. "If that's your main worry, don't sweat it, Mom. Emily's not even potty trained. You are obviously my older sister!"

"You flatter me. What do you want?"

"Nothing," Phillip shook his head. "Just to say thanks, again, for being my mom. To say I'm sorry, for all the trouble I've caused you guys."

"We got through it, didn't we, sweetheart?" Amanda saw Phillip nod. They were both silent for a few moments, thinking back to Phillip's first year of high school, his difficulties adjusting, and the accident that killed his girlfriend and her sister and could have killed him. Finally, Amanda spoke again. "Sometimes, getting through things is about all you can hope for. Sometimes you do better than that, and I think we did. Besides, look how close you and Lee are now."

"He's been good for you, Mom, you know?"

"I know."

"He's been good for all of us. I kind of envy Emily. She's got these two wonderful parents who love her more than anything, and who will always be there for her."

Amanda thought she knew where this was leading. "Your dad loves you, you know that, don't you?"

"Yeah, but it's not the same. I don't think he has ever been comfortable talking about the accident with me. I feel like there's this big part of my life that he just won't share in, even if it wasn't a very good part."

"That can't be right," Amanda said. "Look how supportive he and Carrie have been."

"Mostly Carrie, Mom." Phillip looked up to see Lee and Jamie coming toward them. "I didn't want this to get heavy. It's really okay." He stood, and helped Amanda to her feet. Holding her hand, he put his other hand on Lee's shoulder. "I'm just really glad that my parents were able to drop me off today."

Lee and Amanda exchanged glances, and Amanda saw the look in Lee's eyes. It was a look of pride in his stepson, and gratitude for Phillip's comment. Lee gave Phillip a hug. "I don't think we would have missed it for anything. We're both very proud of you."

Jamie coughed. "Are you all done now?" he wanted to know. "I'm

getting hungry, and we need to drive home and rescue Grandma." Amanda laughed, thinking of Emily at home with her mother. Emily seemed to have even more energy than both boys combined at the same age. Yes, a rescue was definitely in order.

Phillip punched his brother in the arm. "Go on, get out of here. It's time for me to figure this stuff out on my own. Take good care of Emily. I'm gonna miss her."

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****Chapter Two: Arlington, Christmas 1991****

Dinner was not going well. Amanda wasn't sure what was up, but the air was so thick that even the turkey knife wouldn't have helped - although she had seriously thought of using it on Joe at one point. When she mentioned having everyone over for dinner, Lee thought it would be a good idea. They hadn't seen much of Joe and Carrie lately, and with Phillip home on break it seemed like the perfect opportunity. Of course, then Aunt Lillian had decided to come at the last minute. Every spare corner of the house was full. Suitcases and sleeping bags were everywhere. Thank goodness, Lee thought, that the Colonel had cancelled at the last minute or his headache would probably be rivaling the one Amanda appeared to have.

As Jamie and Phillip began to clear the table, and Dotty took Emily over to the tree to further explore all of the new toys, Amanda suggested that the rest of them have dessert in the living room. As everyone else began to go, Joe hung back. "Amanda? Can I talk to you for a minute?"

"Sure." She got up and closed the doors that connected the dining room and kitchen. Then, she sat in the chair next to him. "What's up?"

"Listen, I really do want to thank you for inviting us for dinner."

"But?" Amanda asked.

"I can't stay."

"You're not working, Joe, are you? It's Christmas. I even got Lee to take two days off for the holiday, barring any national disasters of course."

"No, it's not work." He was silent for a few seconds, realizing that what he needed to tell her was probably harder than the conversation they had over lunch five years ago. If nothing else, it was infinitely sadder - an admission of failure. "Carrie and I have separated."

"Oh, Joe, I'm sorry." Amanda didn't know what to say. She'd no idea they were even having problems, but then again, they didn't talk much anymore now that the boys were older. Still, part of her felt bad for not being a better friend, but it least explained his mood at the table.

"There's nothing you could have done," Joe said, reading her mind. "Maybe it's the age difference, maybe I do work too much . . ."
Amanda wondered what he wasn't saying, but she kept silent. "Carrie

brought her own car," he continued. "I know she really wanted to come tonight, to see everyone, Phillip especially." Joe smiled for a moment. "Will you tell him how proud I am of him?"

Amanda touched his hand. "Why don't you?"

"I can't. Not tonight. I just need to be alone."

Amanda walked him to the door, and then joined the rest of the family in the living room. Carrie looked up at her, and let out a small grimace that said she had a pretty good idea what had gone on in the dining room. Amanda just shrugged her shoulders in return, not knowing what to say. She perched herself on the arm of the couch next to where Lee was sitting. His hand automatically went around her waist, and she smiled. Listening to the conversations, she realized that in some bizarre way, Carrie was much more relaxed around everyone when Joe wasn't there. It must be, Amanda thought, all the time she spent here after Phillip's accident. Lee caught the glances between the two women, and wondered to himself if Joe King had just made the second biggest mistake of his life.

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****Chapter Three: Arlington, March 1992****

Lee was trying to read the reports he had brought home, but the voices from upstairs kept interrupting his train of thought. He knew if Amanda was home she would go upstairs and see what was the matter with the two of them, but he figured he'd give them some privacy. It didn't seem as if any blows had been struck yet, and by the lack of noise through the intercom from Emily's room, she appeared to be sleeping through it all.

"Sure, you're just friends. Right." Jamie pushed the point again.

"Why won't you let it alone?" Phillip asked. "She's having a really rough time right now. She just needs a friend."

"And you're it?"

"Dad's being a jerk!" Phillip told him.

"Dad's a jerk about a lot of things. I still don't buy it!"

"She was here to help, after the crash. She knew what I was going through. She knew what it was like to wonder why . . . and if there was something I could have done differently."

Jamie shook his head. "Come on, it's spring break. Everyone I know in college is in Florida. You're home. I'm just not buying it."

"Did you ever think that maybe I didn't want to go spend a week getting wasted?"

Phillip stormed down the stairs, ignoring the apology Jamie was trying to give, and stopped when he saw Lee sitting there reading. Hoping that he hadn't heard their discussion upstairs, he tried to sneak to the front door.

"It's really hard to get past a spy, Phillip."

"Yes, sir." Phillip acknowledged. "I just needed some air."

"I could hear. Is everything all right?"

"Yeah, it will be. Jamie's just misinterpreting something. I need to go out for a while. Can I borrow the car?"

Lee grimaced, knowing what his answer was going to be. "Um, your Mom has the Jeep and your Grandmother has the wagon."

"Oh, that's okay. Maybe I'll just take a walk then."

"So if you put even so much as the tiniest scratch on it, you're going to be spending the rest of your break buffing it out." He threw his keys over to his stepson.

Phillip stood there, shocked. He looked at the key ring he just caught. "You're letting me take your car?"

"Think you can handle that?"

"Oh, yeah, I can handle that." He got to the front door, and turned around. "Thanks, Lee, for everything."

"No problem." Lee sighed, hoping that Jamie was in fact on the wrong track. He knew, however, that Amanda's younger son had inherited her instincts. Jamie was hardly ever wrong, especially where Phillip was concerned. He debated talking it over with Amanda when she got home, but decided against it. It wasn't a conversation he should have heard, and not one he wanted to get clarification on any time soon.

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****Chapter Four: Arlington, Early June 1992****

Amanda pulled into the driveway and sighed. It had been a long day and she was exhausted. She thought back over her lunch with Joe, and now here was Carrie's car parked in front of the house. She wished Lee were here, and not in New York at the U.N. gathering. She knew she could have gone with him, but she also knew that things would run smoother if she stayed behind, both at work and at home. Opening her car door, she decided to just go in and face her sons.

In the living room, Jamie and Emily were quietly coloring. "Hey there!" Amanda greeted them, and went over to pick up her almost three year old daughter. "Did you two have a good day?"

"Yeah, I took Em to the zoo after lunch to give Grandma a break," Jamie told his mother. "We just got back a little while ago. I swear I think she liked the metro ride better than the animals."

"Thanks, Jamie. That was really sweet."

"Beth came too, Mommy." Emily chimed in. "She got me a balloon, but it popped, so she got me an ice cream cone."

Amanda laughed. "You brought your girlfriend along to help babysit?"

"No, Mom," Jamie told her. "It was Beth's idea for us all to go to the zoo. We had a good time, and I didn't pawn Emily off on her, honest."

"How long has Carrie been here?" Amanda asked.

"Don't know, they've been out back since we got home," Jamie answered pointing to the gazebo. "Do you know what's up?"

Amanda nodded, and sat on the couch. "Your Dad is going back to Africa. He told me at lunch today."

"Alone?" Jamie asked, shaking his head. Why his father would put his work in front of family twice was beyond him. For the last few years, he had watched the precarious balancing act that Lee and his mother had just about perfected, and it saddened him to realize that his father was just incapable of trying to do the same thing. "I had hoped they'd work it out."

"Me too, but it doesn't look like it. They're putting the house up for sale, and your Dad said that Carrie is thinking of going to stay with her parents in California for a while."

"Do you know what happened?" Jamie asked, partially out of concern but partially out of curiosity.

"Your dad didn't say specifically. He mentioned a few things at Christmas: his job, the age difference. I got the feeling that those were only part of it. I'm sorry sweetheart, I know you're going to miss him."

"It's a good thing they didn't have any kids," Jamie said pensively.

Amanda nodded, and watched her son closely. She realized that he was very aware of what Joe's priorities were, and had always been. Holding his hand, she remembered back to last Christmas, when Carrie had been playing with Emily. Now that she thought about it, Carrie spent a lot of time with Emily at family gatherings. Maybe if there had been children, it would have been different this time, Amanda thought. "Maybe . . . " she began.

"It wouldn't have made a difference, Mom," Jamie interrupted, almost reading her thoughts.

"You don't know that." Amanda reminded him.

"No, I don't," he admitted. "I'm sorry. It's just dredging up some old memories."

"Yeah, for me too, you know? What about Phillip?" Amanda asked.

"I don't know - discussions about Dad have kind of been off limits lately." Jamie paused. "I got mad when he was taking Carrie's side. Of course, here I am blaming Dad anyway." He looked outside. "I guess she's filling him in on the latest."

Amanda turned her head to look out back. She realized she couldn't see a thing, which was probably a good thing given how many times she and Lee used to talk out there before. But was it a good thing now,

she wondered to herself? It was sad really, to think that the boys would probably miss their stepmother more than their father. Phillip would, of that Amanda had no doubt.

She remembered the first very awkward meeting with Joe and Carrie. Picturing many of the female attorneys she knew, Amanda hadn't been prepared for the petite blond on Joe's arm. Oh my gosh, Amanda remembered thinking, she's so . . . young. She realized that the boys had picked up on her discomfort, and often avoided being alone with their stepmother. Then came Phillip's accident, and Lee made her see past appearances and forced her to accept the help that was offered. It had been a turning point, with Carrie becoming firmly ensconced as a member of the family in her own right, not just as Joe's wife.

Amanda went into the kitchen, and began to pull food out for dinner. "Will Carrie stay for dinner, do you think?"

"I don't know, Mom. You trying to get me to go out there and ask?" Jamie thought he'd rather cook dinner and clean up afterwards rather than interrupt the conversation outside.

"I'll ask in a minute. Why are you chicken? What's going on anyway?" Amanda could see something was bothering Jamie, but she wasn't sure what it was. "Exactly how hard do you think it's going to be on your brother?"

"Do I think he's going to go get drunk? Is that what you want to know?" He saw his mother bite her lip, and then nod her head. "No, I don't think so. It's just kind of weird how connected they are."

"And? She's your stepmother. You and Phillip are both pretty close to Lee," Amanda reminded him.

Jamie was saved from a response by the back door opening. Phillip and Carrie came into the house, both of them looking somber. "Hi Amanda, Hi Jamie," Carrie greeted them quietly. She looked over to Amanda. "I guess you heard . . . "

"Yeah, I had lunch with Joe." Amanda walked over to the younger woman and embraced her. "I'm really sorry. I know I should have something more profound to say, but I don't. We were all hoping it was a temporary situation."

"Me too," Carrie admitted, "or at least I did for a while. Now, it's all a jumble." She pulled away and paced back and forth. "This is really weird you know. I feel like I'm a part of your family and I married your ex-husband."

"You are a part of this family, no matter what. Remember that, if you need anything."

"Thanks. I think what I need now is space. Some time away . . . I'm going out to California for a while." Amanda nodded, and Carrie continued. "Give Emily a hug and a kiss for me. I don't think I can do it right now. Tell Lee that he's really a lucky man. Maybe it's a good sign and gives some hope for what happens after Joe King runs out on you." She looked down at that point. "Sorry, bad joke. I'll drop a line once I'm settled."

Carrie started toward the front door, and Phillip began to follow her. She turned around to face him, shook her head, and continued out. Amanda watched her son as he stood there, his expression blank. She walked up to him, and silently put her arms around him while he stood there, unable to move.

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Later in the evening, Amanda went upstairs to phone her husband. "Lee, he was out for a two hour run!" Amanda said into the phone. "I'm really worried."

"I'm really impressed," Lee laughed. "You know how awful the humidity is right now? Says a lot for his stamina that he lasted that long."

"I really wished you were here so you could impress me with your stamina," Amanda replied.

"What's really going on?" Lee wanted to know. "It's not like you to proposition me when I'm completely unable to do anything about it."

She laughed. "Okay, so my changing the subject isn't working"

"Only because it's a phone conversation," he reminded her.

"Point taken. I'm just kind of worried. The rift between Joe and Carrie has created quite a spillover in his relationship with his sons." Amanda heard the snort through the phone. "Don't," she warned him, "I know what you're thinking."

"That he's done this before? Thank God they're older now."

"I know. Jamie said almost the same exact thing. But with Phillip it's different," Amanda paused. "The distance with his dad, well, we've seen that get wider lately. But with Carrie leaving, Lee, he looked devastated, as if he were losing his best friend!"

"They've been very close." Lee was silent for a moment, but continued. "I think it will be good for Phillip though. Give him some perspective."

"You too?" Amanda wanted to know. "You sound like Jamie."

Uh, oh, Lee thought. "Listen, maybe Jamie has something here. I don't think there was anything going on other than friendship, but he's become pretty dependent on her, you know? When was the last time you saw him bring a girlfriend by the house?"

"He's in college, Lee, he's supposed to be studying!"

"He's nineteen, Amanda. Trust me. Studying shouldn't be on his mind most of the time!"

"I don't want to be having this conversation about my little boy."

"Your six-foot four little boy? He's taller than I am!"

"Good night sweetheart," she told him. "Get home soon."

Amanda hung up the phone, and sat on the edge of her bed. She shook her head. This was all too weird, she thought to herself, like something out of a soap opera or something. Well, not exactly, she amended. If it were a soap opera then there would have been something going on between Phillip and Carrie. Instead, it was something just hanging in the air above them, waiting. Kind of like . . . No, she said to herself, I am not going to finish that thought. I am going to go downstairs and be supportive of my sons and stop thinking things like this.

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****Chapter Five: Jamie's High School Graduation Party, June 1993****

"Mom! We're out of guacamole again!" Amanda glared at Lee after hearing Phillip's comment.

"I bought enough to get through this party and next Christmas!" she scolded him. "What did you do with it?"

"Nothing! Really! Did someone move it?"

"Amanda," Dotty interrupted, "it's in the garage. Yes, I moved it. All those glass bottles, I was afraid of them breaking. Emily seemed fascinated and if it stayed within her reach there wouldn't have been any left."

Lee grinned. "We know where she got her taste buds from, I guess."

Shaking her head, Amanda went toward the house to help Phillip find the missing guacamole. As she entered the kitchen, she stopped. "Carrie!"

"Hi Amanda. Hope you don't mind me crashing your party."

"No, never. The boys were disappointed when you wrote to say you wouldn't be able to make it. I'm glad you're here. Come on out back - that's where everyone is."

"Um, is . . . " Carrie looked embarrassed.

"Is Joe here?" Amanda supplied the question for her. "No. He couldn't get away. He will be coming to help Jamie get settled in at Georgetown though. It's a pretty sore subject today. But I think having you here will do wonders."

"Are you sure?" Carrie asked. "It's been a while. I mean, getting away was really good for me, and my folks were very supportive and all . . . "

"Nonsense. Listen, I have to go help Phillip find some missing condiments. Go out back. We'll be out in a minute. It's safe and friendly. Really." Amanda pushed her toward the door, and went in search of her son.

She found Phillip in the garage, leaning against her car with the guacamole box on the hood. "Hey, I see you found it."

"Yeah, thought I'd check Grandma's hiding places," Phillip answered.

"Well come on. I have a surprise for you," Amanda began.

"I saw her come up the walk," Phillip confessed. "I know it's silly, but I didn't know what to say to her." He turned toward his mother. "I guess I just didn't expect to see her in person. Don't worry. I'm fine. It's Jamie's day, right? Valedictorian, full scholarship to Georgetown . . . he's done really well. Too bad Dad couldn't make it." He looked down to see Amanda's face. "Okay, I'm only a little bitter. For Jamie. Maybe for Carrie, and me and even you. I just think we all deserved a little bit more than he gave." With that comment, Phillip picked up the box, and went back into the house.

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Later that evening, as the party began to wind down and most of Jamie's friends had left, Lee finally got a chance to drag Amanda away from everyone else. "It went well," he told her. "I can't believe that we just hosted a bunch of teenagers here, and nothing much got destroyed."

"The roses . . . " Amanda reminded him.

"We'll buy Dotty some new bushes. It's a small price to pay."

"Says the man who left his car at work!" Amanda playfully teased her husband.

"I just didn't want it to be an attractive nuisance. Seriously, Mrs. Stetson, look at your sons." Lee pointed to where Phillip and Jamie were talking quietly with Jamie's girlfriend, Beth, and another girl. "They look relaxed and happy. Strong, handsome, healthy. You've done one hell of a job raising them, you know."

"I had some help."

"Too bad Joe couldn't be here today," Lee commented.

"Forget about Joe. I'm talking about you. Do you know how good you have been to both of them? Despite all of our jokes about not knowing what normal means, we've actually managed to give them a pretty normal life here. Having Emily, my mother being here, even watching us fight and knowing that in the end we make up." She took a breath. "Okay, I'm babbling just a little," Amanda conceded, "but I'm entitled. It's going to be a lot quieter around here once Jamie moves out."

"Not much," responded Lee as he watched Emily run by with some of her friends who had apparently snuck over when no one was paying attention. "Is that a dog they're chasing?" he asked.

"I don't want to know! By the way, have you seen Carrie? I saw her talking to Jamie earlier but then she disappeared."

"Dotty had her cornered for a little while. Don't worry, she was only asking about vacation tips for when she visits California next month."

"I didn't notice if Phillip managed to talk to her at all."

"I don't know. He seemed to be avoiding her initially. He seems more relaxed now. Beth's friend is kind of cute." Lee shifted his glance back to the party for a minute, and Amanda followed his gaze. He felt her stiffen next to him, as Carrie approached the foursome. They watched in silence as Carrie was introduced to the group. Amanda watched as Phillip broadened the circle to include her, and introduced her to the girls. She watched as Carrie gave Jamie a hug, and smiled as she saw her younger son return it. As Carrie turned to leave, Amanda watched Phillip take her arm to make her wait. Amanda held her breath, as Phillip walked toward them.

"I'm going to take Carrie over to her hotel, so she doesn't have to call a cab. Is that okay?"

"Sure." Lee said, noticing Amanda was quiet. "Just make sure you get back here to help us clean this mess up afterwards."

"No problem," Phillip told them. He bent down, kissed his mother on the cheek and whispered, "I'm fine, don't worry."

Amanda turned to Lee. "Don't say a word. I don't want to hear it," she warned him.

"I wasn't going to say anything. Really, except . . . "

"She doesn't look like anyone's stepmother, does she?" Amanda finished. "And judging from that little group over there," Amanda motioned with her head, "they don't think so either."

Lee watched as Beth's friend, obviously upset, walked away from Jamie and Beth. "Listen," Lee began, "they've been divorced for just about a year now. She's living in California. It's just a visit."

"She's ten years older than he is!"

"Doesn't look it." Rubbing his side from where his wife poked him, Lee continued. "She was more than ten years younger than Joe," he reminded her. "Besides, they're all adults now. Nothing we can do. Trust your son."

"I do trust him. I just worry, about both of them if you must know the truth." Amanda gave Lee a look that tugged on his heart, and he remembered their early friendship. He had to concede that he saw it too, and he worried about it as well.

After about an hour, the last of Jamie's friends had wandered off. He walked over to where Amanda, Lee, Dotty and even Emily were cleaning up the remains of the party, and began to help them.

"Need a hand?" Phillip asked as he walked toward them with one of their large garbage cans.

"That was quick." Lee remarked.

"Carrie has an early morning flight to New York tomorrow. She's interviewing for a job there. Same firm she's been working for in the Bay Area, so she'll probably get the job. But she was nervous and

wanted to go back over her notes and stuff."

"New York," Amanda commented. "It will be nice to have her a little closer."

"I guess," Phillip answered, as he continued to fill the can. "She seems to be doing really well. Never even mentioned Dad this time."

"Not that he's worth mentioning." Jamie replied.

"Jamie!" Amanda admonished him. "That's your father you're talking about."

"Biologically speaking, yes." At that, Jamie gave Lee a look so penetrating that Lee was forced to bend down and help Phillip pull scraps of paper out of the grass. Joe King, Lee thought to himself, you are a fool, but I have to thank you for this family.
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****Chapter Six: Arlington, August 1994****

"...Happy Birthday dear Emily, Happy Birthday to You!"

"Can I blow them out now, Daddy?" Emily asked her father.

"Yes, you can blow them out now," Lee laughed. It was hard to believe she was five years old and going to start kindergarten in a few weeks. Where did the time go? Phillip had one year left of college, Jamie had finished his first year, and Emily, his little girl, was going to start kindergarten. He was about to pick her up, to help her reach the candles but Phillip beat him to it.

"Guess what I wished for?" she asked.

"You're not supposed to tell," Phillip reminded her, "or it won't come true."

"Yeah, but you always use your birthday wishes for me, so I used mine for you this time."

"I don't need your wishes, Em, but thanks a lot. Happy birthday. How'd you get so big anyway?"

"I eat my breakfast, just like Mommy says to." At that comment, Amanda laughed at the lesson she had taught a five-year old, but not her husband. "Where are my presents?" Emily demanded.

As Emily and her friends pounced on the pile of gifts, Jamie and Phillip moved away from the melee. Amanda laughed as she watched the guests segregate by age: Jamie, Beth and Phillip into the kitchen while she, Lee and Dotty stood aside in the family room.

"Mommy, Mommy, guess what?" Emily ran over to where Amanda stood.

"What is it?"

"I got eight Barbies and they're all different! I got stewardess Barbie, and doctor Barbie, and beach Barbie, and princess Barbie,

and... and... I forgot!" Emily was literally jumping up and down with a Barbie in each hand. "I need to go back and check the rest!"

Amanda had a thought about Barbie dolls and how they looked and she started to laugh as Lee caught her eye.

"What?" he asked as she began to laugh harder. "What?" he asked again.

"It's just... just that I wonder if they should be called Randi," Amanda said as she dissolved into laughter again at the thought of how the dolls seemed to remind her of Lee's old girlfriends.

"Very funny, Amanda," he told her, while Dotty looked on confused and Lee did nothing to clarify Amanda's remarks.

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Later that evening while Amanda, Dotty and Emily were driving the party guests home, Phillip and Jamie cleaned up the remains of the day. Lee had tried to help, but the phone rang and by the time he finished his call they were essentially done.

"Sorry about not helping," Lee said as he watched his stepsons seal up the last of the trash bags.

"No sweat," Jamie told him. "It wasn't anything compared to my graduation party."

"Just stickier," Phillip laughed, as he worked on removing pink frosting fingerprints from the door frame. "My apartment is easily worse than this."

Lee laughed. "I remember the first time your mom saw my place. The look on her face was priceless. Forfeiting two security deposits was a pretty cheap price to pay compared to having to clean out before moving."

"I don't remember your apartment being that bad, Lee," Jamie told him. "Just a little lacking in basic necessities."

"Yeah, like food," Phillip added.

"That's because of your mother. Kept me honest, or at least neat." Lee looked over at Phillip. "So as long as your place is still a mess does that mean there's no one special right now?"

Phillip coughed and Jamie attempted a save. "Emily is really looking forward to going to New York tomorrow with you," he told his brother.

"Yeah, I don't know if it's the train ride or the Museum of Natural History that has her more excited." Phillip smiled. He was looking forward to the planned outing with his little sister. Carrie's gift idea had gone over even better than expected - it was too bad that she was going to be out of town on business and unable to join them. He hadn't seen her since the previous summer, but their friendship was evolving and they spoke often.

"Speaking of dinosaurs, how did the position at the Smithsonian work

out?" Lee asked. Phillip had just finished a summer internship at the National Museum of Natural History in Washington.

"Really well. Thanks for the help in arranging it. I'm going to try to go back next summer, maybe even try for a permanent position."

Lee raised his eyebrows. "Sounds like a safe career move."

"Yeah, Mom will be relieved but it's not me you should be worrying about," Phillip looked over at Jamie who began to squirm in his seat.

"Did I hear the car?" Jamie asked as he got up to open the door for the women of the family. Amanda, Dotty and Emily walked in to find Lee and Phillip laughing in the family room and Jamie looking embarrassed.

"Do I want to know?" Amanda asked.

"Nope," Jamie told her and went upstairs while Amanda looked at her husband who continued to laugh.

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****Chapter Seven: Charlottesville, May 1995****

"I think that's the last of it," Phillip said to Lee as they tied the trunk to his car closed. "I'm glad we had two cars here today. I can't believe how much junk I've accumulated."

Lee pointed to the two U-Hauls across the parking lot. "I think, all things considered, that you did rather well. At least we didn't need one of those."

Phillip laughed. "Thanks for coming down today and helping with this. I really appreciate it."

"No problem. Your mom is actually covering for me at work today. I feel really bad that I can't make it for graduation. Things are still very busy, and tense, at work."

"I understand, Lee." Phillip took a deep breath. "That bombing was scary. I was pretty glad to know you guys usually work underground. You know, Mom called right away." The bombing in Oklahoma City had made the news immediately after it occurred. As speculation about terrorists on American soil began, security at all federal facilities had been hiked up to the highest levels. At U.Va., and other schools close to Washington where so many students were in families of government employees, the atmosphere was tense as people waited to learn more.

Lee nodded. "She knew you'd be worried."

"Pretty embarrassing actually, I was just about to call her. My roommate thought I was nuts." Phillip saw Lee's look. "All I've ever said is that you guys worked for the government. There were enough people freaking out around here for that very same reason. Lee, I want you to know something."

"What's that?"

"I never told anyone outside the family. Never talked on the phone about it. Nothing. That made it a little hard to get any repeat dates around this place." He let out a small laugh. "I kept hearing how I always seemed to be hiding things. But I knew, I know, how important it is for all of us to keep this secret."

"We never thought you did say anything. Figured that was one of the things that was making it so hard on you. Your brother asked a lot of questions."

"And I didn't." Phillip saw Lee acknowledge the truth of the statement. Phillip leaned against the car, and continued. "When you told us about what you and Mom did, everything was happening so fast. You seemed to have everything in control, you know? Not rattled at all. But then when Mom was in Berlin, and you were with us, well, all of a sudden it started to hit me."

Lee nodded, and waited. "I look back, you know, and realize what a jerk I was. How did you put up with me?"

"What choice did I have? Put you out on the street? Your mother would have had me out there with you in a minute. Seriously, Phillip, you were a scared kid going through a rough time. Yeah, your behavior was pretty trying. But after the accident, all we wanted . . . all I wanted . . . was for you to be okay."

Phillip smiled. "And I was, eventually, thanks to you and Mom. Hey, I even made it to U.Va. And for the most part, it hasn't been a big deal here. Okay, maybe a little when something would pop up on the news, but nothing too bad. Then the bombing last month. After talking with Mom, I had this incredible sense of relief." Phillip took a deep breath, knowing the next admission was going to be a tough one. "About ten minutes later I started shaking. Not a little bit. A lot. I wanted to just go out and get drunk."

"Did you?" Lee asked, knowing he wouldn't blame him in the least. Phillip wasn't a kid anymore.

"No. I went for a drive." Second deep breath. Good thing this wasn't Mom. "I went to New York."

"Carrie?"

"I needed someone to talk to. She knew enough about what you all do, just from when she and Dad were married, and from my accident." Phillip paused again. "Was it this hard when you had to come clean with us?"

"Worse," Lee told him, thinking he understood what Phillip wasn't saying. "For the most part, you appear to still be breathing regularly. I wasn't."

"Great. Okay, anyway, I spent a couple of days up in New York, then came back and finished up my class work. We've talked a few times since then, and she's going to come down for graduation. I didn't want to surprise Mom on that one."

"So you want me to talk to your mom?"

"No," Phillip responded, noticing Lee's relief at his answer. "I'll tell her tonight. I just wanted to run it by you first."

Lee coughed. "Phillip, what exactly are you trying to say here? Is there something going on between you and Carrie?"

"Truthfully? I don't know yet. We need to take our time, figure it out." He held up a hand. "I know, there's the age difference. She was married to Dad, which in itself makes this all very weird. I'm not doing anything drastic - neither of us is. I've got the new job at the Smithsonian that starts in July. She's still working in New York." Phillip braced himself for what he thought would be Lee's response. Instead, he was surprised.

"It's going to be rough, you know. I don't know how your mom is going to take it, although I think she saw something there, maybe even before you did. She's pretty perceptive."

"So's Jamie," answered Phillip, remembering some of their discussions on the topic.

"They're a lot alike," Lee agreed. "Listen, I appreciate the confidence. I think I'd better return the favor."

"Huh?" Phillip asked.

"Your dad phoned last night. He's coming for the graduation. Swore us to secrecy, wanted it to be a surprise. Given what you've just told me, I don't think that it would have quite the effect he intended."

"Shit," Phillip swore. "Thanks."

"Are you ready to start the drive back?" Lee asked.

"I have a call I need to make. I'll meet you at home later. Okay?"

"Yeah, okay."

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Chapter Eight: Commencement, University of Virginia: May 1995

Carrie was sitting next to Lee as they waited for the procession to begin. "I shouldn't be here. It's just too weird."

"You should be here. And it is weird. An old friend of mine once told me she couldn't let me be normal, not me and Amanda both." He glanced down the row: at Emily fidgeting in her seat next to him, at Jamie and Beth, Dotty, and finally Amanda and Joe at the far end of the row. "None of this is normal."

Carrie followed his gaze. "I'm glad you're here: moral support and all. I thought you weren't going to be able to make it," she said to him.

"I juggled some schedules. Granted, I have to run as soon as the ceremony is over to catch a plane, but I thought . . . "

"Thank you, from both of us," Carrie interrupted him. She sighed. "I can't believe Joe made it."

"It'll be fine. Nothing's going to happen." Lee tried to reassure her, but he had to admit that he was nervous. He hoped that Joe's normal obtuseness would prevent him from noticing anything other than the obvious. Phillip and Carrie were certainly working on not being obvious. Jamie hadn't even made any remarks, but maybe that was due to Beth's presence. Lee caught Amanda's eye, as she was watching Jamie and Beth, and gave her a smile. If only everything were so simple.

Later in the day, after Lee had left, Carrie volunteered to take Emily for a walk. The little girl had done well, but was obviously tired of sitting still. Carrie had enough nervous energy to have complete sympathy.

After the two of them had left, Joe turned to Amanda and the boys. "I'm sorry she's so uncomfortable around me." Jamie started coughing, and turned away from the group after catching Phillip's eye.

"You know she came for Jamie's graduation from high school?" Amanda asked him.

"I heard. How is she doing?" Joe had heard very little from his second ex-wife in the last year. He felt a little strange asking his first ex about her.

"Good, I think," Amanda replied. "She's in New York now. Turned down a partnership to concentrate on more pro-bono work - juvenile cases mostly. She seems more at peace lately."

"I don't know how it all unraveled," Joe told her. "I guess my track record is pretty bad around here, huh?"

Amanda shook her head and thought to herself, it was always about you, Joe, wasn't it? We were just all supposed to follow along behind while you figured out what was important and what wasn't. It didn't matter if it was what we wanted or needed. "Joe, it's Phillip's day today," she reminded him. "Let's drop this for now and go get dinner, okay?"

"What about Carrie and Emily?" Joe asked.

Phillip answered. "No way Em would sit through a restaurant dinner. Carrie said she'd get a Happy Meal for her, and meet us all later." Phillip sighed, and took his dad's arm. "I'm sorry today was hard on you. But I'm glad that everyone was able to make it today - it was important to me."

"You've done really well, son," Joe told him. "I know I haven't been around much, and I'm sorry."

"It's okay. Really. It wasn't okay for a while, but I'm not a kid anymore." Phillip was wondering if Carrie and Emily were having fun, wishing that he was with them at McDonald's right now, instead of having this conversation with this father. "Let's go get dinner. Think we can do it in two cars? I'll ride with Jamie and Beth." With that, Phillip grabbed his brother's arm and guided him away.

"You did good," Jamie told him. "Better than I could have."

"I had such an urge," Phillip began.

"To shake him?" Jamie asked. "Or worse?"

"I don't know. Listen, I'm glad you guys could make it. I can't believe next year we're going to be at your graduation, little bro. Georgetown in three years. Pretty damn impressive." He saw Beth smiling, and he envied them their easy friendship and their growing love for each other.

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****Chapter Nine: New York, December 1995****

"So what do you want to do for Christmas? Will you come home with me?" Phillip asked. He looked at Carrie, who was sitting next to him on the couch going through Christmas cards.

She shook her head. "I'm really glad you came up here for the weekend...."

"Please?"

Carrie groaned. "I'm sorry. I don't think I can go. I'm just not ready." She felt guilty. She knew how big a day Christmas was for Amanda, and hence for the whole family. She knew that Amanda and Lee were sincere in their invitation, but she just wasn't ready to be there with Phillip. Carrie was surprised how comfortable she was with their relationship, as long as she didn't have to watch her past collide with her present. Christmas at Amanda's represented that collision.

"That's okay," Phillip told her. "We'll just spend it here. Just the two of us. We can go out for a nice dinner, skate at Rockefeller Center."

"No, Phillip, you can't miss Christmas at home!" Carrie protested.

"They won't notice. Honest. They're going to be too busy with wedding talk." Carrie raised an eyebrow. "Jamie has one hell of a diamond to give Beth for Christmas," he confided. "I'm twenty-three years old. I've only missed Christmas at home once, and I don't think that one counted. I want to spend this Christmas with you. Okay?"

"Okay," Carrie told him.

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****Chapter Ten: Arlington, Christmas 1995****

"Jamie, your dad's on the phone!" Amanda shouted above the conversation.

"Did you say anything to him?" Jamie asked, his hand over the receiver. His mother shook her head. "Good. Thanks . . . Hi, Dad! Merry Christmas! I've got some news for you . . . I got the fellowship at Cambridge . . . Thanks . . . Wait, there's more . . . "

Amanda went back to the dining room, and sat next to Lee. "What did you say about Phillip not being here?" he asked her.

"He was spending the holidays with a friend, and that I was respecting my son's privacy by not saying anything more."

"And what did Joe say?"

"He wanted to meet the woman who finally snagged Phillip." Amanda told him. "It was all I could do to stay standing upright."

"He'll just have to cope with it," Dotty remarked. Looking at the shock on Lee and Amanda's faces, she continued. "It's going to come out sooner or later. Look at the two of you. These kind of secrets have a way of making themselves known. I've kept quiet on it up until now, but if Joe is going to be that stubborn over something he gave up any right to have control over, well it's just too bad. Your boys have a perfectly good father right here," Dotty said to Amanda as she walked over and gave Lee a kiss. "Merry Christmas."

"Lee," Amanda whispered, "close your mouth or Beth's going to start having second thoughts."

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****Chapter Eleven: Graduation Weekend, Arlington, June 1996****

"Jamie!" Amanda yelled up the stairs. "The caterer is on the phone, your grandmother is waiting in the car, and your sister is going to have both herself and Lee covered in chalk in a few minutes if we don't get out of here. Get down here now!"

"Sorry, Mom," Jamie answered as he came down the stairs. "I was just up in the attic looking for something. Why is the caterer calling here?"

"I don't know. He asked for you. Don't look at me that way. You told me Beth's parents were handling everything." Amanda was looking frazzled, and Jamie went up and gave her a hug.

"I know you think we're nuts doing the wedding so close to my graduation, but I have to be in England at the beginning of August." He picked up the phone, and wrote down a few notes. "Okay, I'm ready," he told her once he hung up the phone. "I'm sorry we've made this so hectic for you."

"I know, I know. Too bad you didn't elope." Amanda gave him a smile. "Don't panic. I'm only kidding. Your grandmother would kill me if she heard me say that." She picked up her purse, and pushed her son out the door. "Can we please go see you graduate now?"

As they walked to the car, Jamie asked "What about Phillip?"

"He called from National. They're heading straight over to Georgetown from the airport," Amanda told him.

"And Dad?"

"I sent him his ticket last week to the EAO Office here. I haven't heard a word, though." Amanda assumed Joe would be there. He had said

he was flying in for both the graduation and the wedding.

"I'm sorry about giving him one of the priority tickets, Mom."

"No, I think that was the right thing to do. Your father and I will do just fine for an hour together. Besides, Lee can keep an eye on Emily and I'm sure Phillip and Carrie will be more comfortable with the seating arrangements." Amanda stopped short at the door to the car, and looked over Emily and then Lee. "Oh my gosh, you can't go looking like that!"

"Like what?" Lee asked. He had been trying to carefully avoid the chalk while Emily was drawing, and she had managed to keep most of it off of her clothes.

"Um, how do I say this exactly?" Amanda wondered out loud.

"Daddy has my hand prints on his butt!" Emily laughed. "I'm sorry Daddy."

"Oh great! Listen, why don't you three go ahead. I'll run in and change and come with Emily in a few minutes." Lee started walking toward the house, shaking his head. Fatherhood left him with so little dignity sometimes, he thought.

At that point, Dotty got out of the car. "Listen, you two go ahead. I'll go with Lee and Em. We're all sitting together anyway, so it'll just be easier. Jamie, you don't want to be late!"

"Thanks Mother," said Amanda. "Tell Lee I've got his car." She smiled and turned to Jamie. "Let's get out of here before he tries to stop me," she laughed.

Their drive to Georgetown was short and uneventful. As they pulled into the parking garage, Jamie turned to his mother. "I just have one question, and you don't have to answer it, but I've really been wondering."

"Go on," replied Amanda.

"I just don't get how you're taking this whole thing with Phillip and Carrie so, so, calm."

"That's not a question," Amanda teased. "Seriously? First off, we don't know what "this whole thing" is. Second, what would I have to gain by voicing my concerns? Phillip knows them all anyway and it's not going to change how he feels, only how he might act. Yeah, I've got some concerns about the age difference. Fewer concerns now than I would have thought. I've got concerns about how your dad fits in, or doesn't, with all of this. I don't even want to think about any family trees your sister might have to draw . . . "

"But you usually let us know if you don't like what we're doing. You sure gave me hell last month when you found out that I was going to be doing an internship with the crypto guys at MI-6 next year," Jamie reminded her.

"I gave Lee hell for that one too, and for not telling me before he set it up!" Amanda took a breath and looked her youngest son straight in the eyes. "Jamie, I can't say anything on this one. It's not my

call anymore. He's an adult."

"And I'm not?"

"We're talking about you choosing a potentially dangerous career, one I know only too well and as your mother it scares me to death. With your brother, it's not the same." She paused. "I really hate to admit it, but when I see the two of them together I see something . . . it's like they are part of the same whole."

"Like you and Lee?" Jamie asked. "From unconventional beginnings?"

"Sort of," Amanda admitted as they entered the hall at the university. "For what it's worth, you and Beth have the same look even if it's all been a much more normal process." At that point, Amanda spotted Joe searching for his seat. "There's your dad. I'd better go over there. I love you sweetheart."

"Me too, Mom, me too."

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****Chapter Twelve: Jamie's wedding, June 1996****

As the clapping continued, Phillip sat back down and loosened his tie. "Nice speech," Lee told him.

"Thanks. I think that's the end of my official duties as best man," he said looking across the room at the table where Carrie was sitting. "Do you think I can ditch for a while?"

Lee smiled. He looked down the table at the rest of the wedding party. Joe and Jamie were speaking quietly, while Beth and her sisters were huddled down at the end. "Sure your 'date' won't mind?" he teased.

"Beth's sister is not thinking about me as a date. Her boyfriend is here and I think she's about as anxious to get away from this table as I am."

"Well, I'm finally going to ask your mom to dance," Lee told Phillip. "Why don't the two of you join us on the dance floor?"

Phillip shook his head. "She didn't even want to sit with Em, Mom and Grandma at first." He glanced back to Joe and Jamie who were still talking. "I don't want to push things right now. I'd hate to have anything ruin this day for Jamie."

Lee nodded, and motioned to Phillip that Joe was approaching. "What's up?" Phillip asked his father.

"I was just telling Jamie that I'm going to have to head out soon. I have a flight out tonight for London, and then it's back to Africa after that. I just wanted to check with his arrival in England. With the new EAO office there, there's a chance I can come over and help them get set up."

"That's real nice of you, Joe," Lee told him. "It's probably going to be a little hard initially for them, new place and all. Jamie's going to be so busy with his fellowship and all that entails, and Beth has

to register for classes at Cambridge and all. I'm sure they'll appreciate any help you can give them."

They shook hands, and as Lee left to join Amanda, Joe turned to his oldest son. "So, where's your date?" Phillip looked at him questioningly. "You know," Joe continued, "the reason you weren't home for Christmas?"

"Oh, well, this just didn't seem like the right time. I've been paired up with Beth's sister Laura most of the time. It wouldn't have been fair."

"Too bad, I wanted to meet her." Phillip stood there, reminding himself to breathe as Joe continued. "That was really nice of your brother to invite Carrie to graduation and to the wedding. I figured I'd see her at your graduation, but I didn't know about your brother."

"Well, Mom keeps reminding us all that once you're part of this family there really isn't any escape." Escape, Phillip thought looking around the room, how can I possibly get out of here? Finally, he caught Lee's eye on the dance floor. He watched as Lee whispered something to Amanda, and then left the room. Amanda went over to the table, said something to Carrie, who then followed out the same doors Lee had gone out moments earlier. Amanda then walked over to where Phillip and Joe stood.

"Lee said you have to leave early," Amanda told him. "I'm sorry you can't stay longer."

Phillip took his cue from his mother, and giving his father a quick goodbye, he quietly slipped out. He found Lee in the hallway, with a grin on his face. "Listen, the Maitre D owed me a favor," Lee told him. "The small ballroom is not in use today. I think there's someone waiting for you in there." Phillip followed Lee's glance, and walked down the hall.

Inside, music was playing softly, and the lights were low. Carrie stood just inside the doorway, and turned when she heard him enter.

"That was very sweet of them," she told him. "I'm sorry I'm such a wimp about this."

"Relax. Dad's leaving soon. Let's have one dance here. Then maybe, after he's gone, will you come back into the reception and dance with me in public?"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. Are you?"

"Yeah."

"Okay. Well right now, can I just please have a dance with the most beautiful woman I know?"

As they began to dance, Lee pulled the door closed and went back in search of his wife. As he entered the room, he saw that Amanda was now sitting between Joe and Dotty. She looked tired, he noticed, and

in need of a rescue. As he approached the table, he could hear their conversation. He stopped for a few seconds, unsure of interrupting.

"Joe, Amanda, please!" Dotty was hissing. "This is Jamie's day. If you can't be quiet then please go outside!"

Realizing the path outside would go past where Phillip and Carrie had gone, Amanda shook her head. "I am not going outside, and I am not continuing this conversation. Joe, thank you so much for finding the time in your busy schedule to fit in your son's wedding." Lee hadn't heard Amanda use that tone in a very long time. He resumed his slow walk toward the table. "But right now I want to enjoy myself and dance with my husband." She looked up and smiled at Lee. "Get me away from him before I do something I might not regret!" she hissed.

As they danced, Lee felt the tension leave Amanda. "You starting to feel better?"

"Um hum. Just keep dancing with me and I'll be fine."

"As long as you want Mrs. Stetson." Lee gave his wife a kiss on her forehead. "You know, there really is one good thing that can be said about Joe."

"Oh, please!"

"He has very good taste in women . . . "

"Stop. Dance Scarecrow! Dance."

Joe watched as Amanda playfully swatted at Lee on the dance floor. He turned and looked at Dotty. "I am sorry."

"You should be. You never should have been questioning her like that."

"No, I'm not sorry about that. I'm sorry that I took so long to come to my senses with Amanda. I was hoping to not repeat it this time. I thought, maybe, after some time apart, Carrie and I, well . . . " Joe stopped, lost for words.

"It's too late, Joe," Dotty said to him. He looked at her questioningly, and she shook her head. "Lord knows this family has had enough secrets, but this one isn't mine to tell. Go back to Africa, Joe. Your boys are men now. They have their own lives. Let this family move on in peace." She leaned over and gave him a hug. "Good bye, Joe," Dotty said to him, and walked away to find her granddaughter.

Joe looked around. Jamie and Beth were now dancing as well. He had said his goodbyes. Maybe Dotty was right, maybe it was just too late. He quietly slipped from the reception and walked down the hall to the main exit. Hearing soft music coming from one of the rooms, Joe went over and peered through the small window. He smiled as he saw a young couple dancing together, looking as if they were the only two people . . . his smile faded. No, he thought to himself, no, that's just not possible. They turned to each other, and the man bent down to kiss the woman. As she smiled her encouragement, Joe realized it was more than possible. He turned away and walked out of the building.

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****Epilogue: Present Day, Arlington****

As Lee waited for his wife to return, he picked the pen back up and began signing his name on the indicated line in each of the pages in the folders. He tried, but couldn't hear what Amanda was saying on the phone; her voice was deliberately low. Maybe, he thought, if I can get through these quickly the night won't be a complete waste. It was then that he noticed the three boxes against the bookcase. Good thing Jamie had Em until tomorrow. He'd be lucky to finish this up before midnight.

At that moment Amanda came in from the kitchen. Her eyes were unusually bright. At first he worried that she might have gotten bad news, but the thought vanished as he saw the slight smile on her face. He walked up to her, and brushed away the beginnings of a tear from the corner of her eye. "What?" he asked quietly.

"That was Phillip."

"And?"

"He said to tell you that he's sorry that he couldn't get here to do this in person, but New York is a little far and he didn't have his key anymore, and so he couldn't quite figure out how to wake you up before six a.m. and let out loud whooping noises in the hallway . . ."

Lee stared at his wife, remembering. "A baby?"

Amanda nodded. "He said to tell you hi, Grandpa."

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Later that night, as they lay in bed together, Lee teased his wife. "I have to thank Phillip for getting your mind off those files downstairs."

"I think it's his happiness that's infectious. You should have heard him on the phone, Lee, he was so excited." She paused. "I had pretty much given up on the two of them having a family."

"Why?"

"Old ghosts, mostly. I think they were both afraid, a little."

"And now?" Lee asked.

"I think they're both putting the ghosts to rest. They want to name the baby Rachel Jennifer, if it's a girl."

"After Carrie's sister?" Lee asked, remembering that night long ago when Phillip was in the hospital and Carrie told him the story of her own accident and her sister's death.

Amanda nodded. "And your mother." She watched as she saw the slow smile spread across his face. "Also, we need to plan a trip to New York for next weekend," Amanda added.

"We do?"

"She finally agreed to marry him." Amanda sighed. "Figured that maybe they should make it legal and all."

"I'm happy for them, really, but can we please get back to what we were doing earlier?"

"Files?"

"No. Most definitely not files." Lee leaned toward his wife, and began to kiss her neck. Amanda reached behind her, and turned off the last remaining light.

End
file.